

Mathletics

by Link Starbureiy

So, I got to thinking about the future of technology and sports.

I'm curious to know what would happen if a majority of people were to 'play' math as they do their favorite pastime sport. My confidence outmatches my curiosity in this space, however, as I'm sure that the human being's deep need for amusement trumps even nutrition sometimes. One of the barriers I've come across is that everything is subjective. Mention the word 'mathletics' to someone in academics today, and they'll respond with an academic answer. To them, mathletics is a bunch of geeks rehashing college-level trigonometry problems. And this is worldwide.  Supposedly, timing out on problem sets is a viable sieve for finding future research mathematicians (granted, a number of Fields Medalists have been past IMO winners). On the other hand, mention 'mathletics' to those outside of academia, and people become very shy. That probably has a lot to do with the stigma of math itself.

Most of today's mathematical scholarship is expressed as a mix of Roman and Greek characters. A lot of that has to do with one or two persons; great, but few. Gauss spoke Deutsch, and probably little else, so when he had to communicate and confer with other mathematicians on his native continent who all spoke other languages, it was done in written Latin. As a common denominator, selecting a dead language was a simple device for printing on folio stock. Clever move.

One of the questions amateurs and enthusiasts tend to ask when surveying mathematics is "When are they (mathematicians) going to really change the landscape of mathematics?". By this, we presume these

people mean that because of the way mathematics has been done for the past 400 or so years, the European symbolism is starting to date itself compared with more modern technologies.

Fortunately, computers (processors and software) can do a lot of the calculation work for us - including graphing, which speaks to the obsolescence of folio stock.

Part of that stigma may also be the irony of gain. The way I see it, we live in a consumption-based world that is congruent with labor. As it stands, just doing professional quality pure math research likely won't net you a lot of money. And the reasoning goes that if it won't make you a lot of money, why waste your time? But, finding applications of that work could make you very wealthy, and quickly. Yet, one can show that mathematics finds her way into nearly everything, so as a civilization we should be banking. But we're not.



For the tides to turn, there would need to be a couple of things in place.

First, you'd need a support industry; a remuneration mechanism. Participants would have to see tangible benefits for their output, and have that work aligned with the cumulative (layered) foundation that is already in place. Traditionally, to get more work done, people form teams. Teams then become regulated in leagues (think NFL, PGA, or FIFA) where commissions are distributed. Fair (whence all parties are equally unhappy) tournaments are created, and you are left with a legitimate economy.

Second, there would have to be a *phenomenon* - a player so dominant that the rules of the game are continually refined until earnings become a true stochastic.

To make an analogy, there are a few similarities between mathematics and golf that are worth noting. Math, like golf, isn't hard. However, sadly like golf, its professional realm is so encumbered in requisites like credentialing, that it gives off an air of elitism, and as such, not many people can enjoy it enough to reach their full potential. Another thing math and golf have in common is that their practitioners have historically worked best in individual settings - it's just you versus nature. Lastly, having the basic tools at-hand makes doing math inexpensive to get started (assuming that you're a golfing novice who borrows someone else's hand-me-downs).

Here, to change people's thinking, it's going to require a Tiger Woods of sorts, not just for mathematics, but for the body of so-called *mind sports* (like chess, video gaming, bridge, etc.) as a whole. One candidate is Magnus Carlsen. Last year, Carlsen became the World Chess Champion for the first time. This is *after* he set the record for achieving the highest Elo rating ever. He's young. He's hungry. And like Tiger, he has a keen sense of self-destiny.



Another candidate is something you'd expect. Perhaps a clear-thinking laureate who's ground-breaking work is just so darn interesting that you can't ignore it.

Or, just maybe this candidate is something you can't expect; that which you didn't see coming. A true phenomenon.

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